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**AMENDMENT
TO
THE OBJECT AND
CONDITIONS OF A COMBINED
OFFENSIVE ACTION**

—
**TRANSLATION OF A FRENCH OFFICIAL DOCUMENT
OF JULY, 1917, BY THE ARMY WAR COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER, 1917**
—

U.S. **ARMY WAR COLLEGE, 1917**

SEPTEMBER, 1917

**FROM COL. JNO. P. FINLEY, U.S. ARMY,
OFFICER IN CHARGE MILITIA AFFAIRS,
GOV. OF NEW YORK**



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Office of The Adjutant General.

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Miss. Elena Linsky Hadie

12/17/44

WAR DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, *September 26, 1917.*

The following pamphlet on Amendment to the Object and Conditions of a Combined Offensive Action is published for the information of all concerned.

(062.1, A. G. O.)

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

TASKER H. BLISS,
Major General, Chief of Staff.

OFFICIAL:

H. P. MCCAIN,
The Adjutant General.

A.K.H.

(2)

WAR DEPARTMENT,
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
Washington, June 19, 1917.

To all officers of the Army:

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Strict compliance with this injunction is enjoined upon every officer into whose hands any of these confidential documents may come.

By order of the Secretary of War:

H. P. McCain,
The Adjutant General.

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NOTE FOR ARMY GROUPS AND ARMIES.

Herewith there is an amendment to the "Instruction of December 16, 1916, Covering the Object and the Conditions of a Combined Offensive Action."

This amendment has been adopted with the object of introducing immediately into the Instruction of December 16, 1916, the most important alterations resulting from the lessons drawn from recent operations.

The large units under instruction can put it into immediate practice.

The complete revision of the Instruction of December 16, 1916, which will be merged with the Instruction on the Offensive Combat of the Large Units of January 26, 1916, will produce a new Instruction which will be issued later.

(Signed) PETAIN.



GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, July 27, 1917.

AMENDMENT TO THE INSTRUCTION OF DECEMBER 16, 1916, COVERING THE OBJECT AND THE CONDITIONS OF A COMBINED OFFENSIVE ACTION.

1. Replace the title by the following:
"Instruction of December 16, 1916, covering the object and the conditions of an offensive action."
2. Suppress the introduction.
3. Replace Chapters I and II with the new version herewith published.

CHAPTER I.

OBJECT AND CONDITIONS OF AN OFFENSIVE ACTION.

The object of every offensive action is determined by the commander, who intends—

Either to drain the strength of the enemy, while aiming at the capture of certain important sections of his defensive organization at the same time as the destruction or capture of the troops occupying them;

Or, if the general situation permits the contemplation of such a result, to attempt the breaching of the hostile defensive organizations on an extensive front, and then to batter the enemy's local reserves and to develop the attacks with a view to increasing the breach thus opened.

Moreover, even in attrition combat, while aiming at limited objectives, the exploitation of every advantage gained will not be lost sight of.

The battle is conducted according to a general plan of action determined by the high command and derived from a scheme of operations.

It generally takes the form of an assault or of several assaults succeeding one another at intervals as rapidly as possible, each one having been prepared by the previous combination of all available means, and especially by a powerful artillery action.

Before the attack the artillery must accomplish as complete a destruction of the hostile artillery and organizations as possible and should be in a position at the commencement of the attack to neutralize all the adversary's means of defense which have escaped destruction.

THE PLAN AND SCHEME OF OPERATIONS.

The scheme of operations is expressed in the general plan of action.

The operations are based:

(1) On the situation of the enemy and on a thorough study of his organizations and resources. An investigation of the enemy's general organizations will guide the command in the choice of the zone of attack. This selection should be determined by the possibility of deploying greater resources for combat than the enemy, and besides of having available all the installations and means necessary to insure the arrival, under the best conditions, of troops and supplies, as well as the moving of the sick and wounded, etc.

A careful investigation of his organizations and means will lend clearness and precision to the scheme of operations with respect to the use of the forces, particularly the artillery and aircraft. It is often important to direct these forces against a salient of the enemy organization so as to realize the advantage of a concentration of fire and of a rear system of communications more extensive than that of the enemy.

(2) On seeking to obtain a surprise effect, which is obtained by concentrating as rapidly and secretly as possible the means to be employed, and by preparing for their sudden, impetuous, and effective entrance into action.

In this respect well-conceived preparation is indispensable. Consequently, the commanders and staffs of all the large units at the front are under obligation to anticipate and study all possible methods of attack in their particular sectors, to devote themselves in detail to the patient and sustained study of the enemy's defensive organizations and system of artillery, to develop and keep up to date complete notes and precise sketches of all the information obtained. Thus the time required for

the composition of the battle plans and the plans of action for the artillery will be reduced to a minimum for the commanders and staffs of the units designated for an offensive operation in any zone of the front.

(3) On the special conditions of the terrain. The terrain exerts an important influence on the preparation of the attack as well as on its execution.

The preparation on wooded and rough terrains—which can not always be avoided when it is a question of attacking on a broad front—will always present unforeseen contingencies due to the difficulties of observation and to the uncertainty of photographic control.

All parts of attacks on broad fronts may not always be executed simultaneously, since the possession of certain parts of the terrain exercises such an influence on the capture of the adjacent parts that the assailant will be led to undertake the conquest of the former before devoting his efforts to the latter. The capture, for instance, of certain dangerous flanking positions will sometimes form a necessary preliminary operation.

The conditions for the execution of the attack are likewise influenced by the terrain, which it is expedient to make the best use of from the point of view of defilading and the methods of approach by adapting to the terrain the formations of approach by the small units.

Apply the most powerful means in the zones of the terrain where the advance can be most rapid, both by reason of the facilities for passage afforded to the infantry, as of the possibility of action for the artillery; aim to gain, in the direction of the objectives, which it is desired to reach, the positions on the terrain where the enemy might be able to reestablish his front, or those of the debouchments necessary for the continuation of the offensive movement; endeavor by enveloping every wing created by the arrangement of adversary's forces to broaden the initial battle front and to destroy as large a part as possible of the enemy forces; these are the fundamental ideas which ought to govern the formation of every offensive plan of operations.

On this plan depend:

The distribution of the forces and of the means; the organization and exercise of command.

(a) *Distribution of the forces and means.*—The distribution of the forces and means is made with a view of conducting the

combat and of exploiting the success in accordance with the scheme of the operation.

The engagement includes one or more attacks, which should:

(1) Be conducted on a front and to a depth proportional to the forces of infantry and artillery available.¹

(2) Succeed one another as rapidly as possible.

As often as the breadth of the attack permits, it is important to seriously threaten or capture the enemy batteries so as to disorganize the enemy artillery.

Exploiting the success will be the subject of Chapter IV.

(b) *Organization and exercise of the command.*—The command should be organized in such a manner as to provide for conducting the attack with rapidity, continuity, order, and method, which are the necessary conditions of success.

The front of attack of the large units, army corps and infantry divisions, will depend on the mission assigned to them, and particularly on the depth of their objectives.

The army corps engaged will be drawn up in depth; an army corps composed of four divisions will generally place two divisions in line and two in reserve; the divisions will place only the absolutely necessary effectives in the first line.

Drawn up in this manner, the army corps and infantry divisions can form those reserves, which will be necessary for the rapid and continuous prosecution of the attack; make the most of every success by the immediate bringing up of fresh troops; maneuver for enlarging the breaches made in the enemy line and parry the counter attacks. Finally, the reserves will serve to provide for the reliefs which the condition of the troops engaged will render indispensable.

The commander of the army will use his own particular reserves (army corps or divisions, cavalry corps, or cavalry divisions), so as to intervene during the action to exploit the success.

PREPARATION.

The purpose of the preparation is to insure the rapid, systematic, and continuous execution of the plan of operations.

¹ The continuity of the front of attack should be maintained in the artillery preparation. It can not be maintained in the infantry attack, since the infantry has to maneuver to outflank enemy resistance centers which have not been completely destroyed by the artillery preparation.

It aims to realize, by very specific provisions, and without leaving anything to chance, all the conditions favorable to the success of the operation.

The preparation includes: The study of the terrain and the reconnaissance of the objectives; the determination of all the data on the basis of which the use of the forces and means will be directed; the posting of these forces and means; and the putting of the troops into proper condition.

(a) *Study of the terrain and reconnaissance of the objectives.*—The commanders of the large units and their staffs, the commanders of the troops of all arms which will participate in the attack, should study separately and together on the battle maps, on the relief maps,¹ and on photographs the terrain of attack which is assigned to them; they ought also to become acquainted with it on the spot.

This study of the terrain enables them to locate the successive main positions of the enemy, the different lines of trenches, the flanking works, the observing stations, the shelters, the assembling points from which counter attacks can be launched, the probable routes for the reserves and for supplies; further to the rear, the depots of all kinds, the camps, the network of roads and railways available for the use of the adversary.

(b) *The determination of all the data according to which the use of the forces and means will be directed.*—The study of the terrain makes possible the determination of the conditions in which the forces and means will be used; that is to say, the establishment of:

- (1) The battle plan for the infantry (see Chapter II);
- (2) The plan of the artillery action (see Chapter III);
- (3) The plan for exploiting the success (see Chapter IV);
- (4) The plan of liaisons (see Instruction on the Liaison of Dec. 12, 1916).

(c) *Disposition of the forces and means.*—When these data have been determined, it is necessary to provide for the distribution of the forces and means for the purpose of obtaining the best results; that is, to proceed to the—

Preparation of the terrain for the infantry (see Appendix No. 1);

¹The use of relief maps ought not to remain the exclusive function of the staffs. Photographs and relief maps will, in general, be very useful for the officers engaged in executing the operations for giving them an impression of the contour of the terrain which they will have to cross.

Preparation of the terrain for the artillery (see Chapter III);
 Preparation of the terrain for the command according to the plan of the liaisons (successive positions of the command posts and observing stations; use of all the means of liaison.)

It is the duty of the command to insure by every possible precaution, particularly by the general use of camouflage,¹ and by the most rigorous control of conversation and correspondence, the secret of the operations which are being prepared.

Besides, it will often be advantageous to reduce considerably the works so as to secure the benefit of surprise.

On the contrary, it is always advantageous to develop the system of communications.

(d) *Putting the troops into condition.*—This putting of the troops into condition is essential. The attention of the command ought to be directed especially to the following points:

(1) Continuous improvement of the instruction, of the training, and discipline, to be obtained if possible by the transfer of the troops to an instruction camp.

(2) Proper installation as to hygiene, repose, and nourishment.

(3) Morale preparation; confidence in success, which will result mainly in the case of the troops from demonstrating to them the importance of the available resources of artillery, of the intensity of our bombardment, of the conviction in the efficacy of our artillery preparation. A state of mind should be generated in the troops which will make them desire the attack.

EXECUTION.

The execution comprises:

Preparation of the attack by the artillery and aviation service.
 The execution proper of the attack.

(a) *Preparation of the attack by the artillery and aviation service.*—This phase concerns mainly the artillery and aviation service.

¹ Camouflage requires an extensive material and minute provisions on the part of the staffs of all the units. The works to be protected from the enemy's investigations should be dissembled before being commenced. As regards the roads to be masked from the view of the enemy, take up the work early enough to avoid putting the enemy on his guard just as the attack is being prepared.

The field artillery, trench artillery, and heavy artillery ought by systematic, accurate fire—

(1) To destroy as far as possible the enemy artillery before the attack and to neutralize it at the moment of attack.¹

(2) To destroy the defensive organizations of the enemy; auxiliary defenses, flanking works, shelters, observing stations, communication trenches, and maintain the destruction already wrought.

(3) To keep the enemy from renewing his strength, and for this purpose to prevent by fire, directed on his rear, the arrival of reinforcements, food, material, and ammunition.²

The aviation service ought to—

(1) Deprive the enemy aircraft of the opportunity of reconnoitering or observing our positions. For this purpose it strives to gain the complete mastery of the air by destroying every kite balloon or aeroplane which endeavors to take part in the struggle.

(2) Aside from its function in the artillery preparation, keep the command uninterruptedly informed of all the movements and works carried out by the enemy (operation of the railways, highways, localities, etc.).

(3) Bombard systematically the known munition and supply depots, the cantonments, camps, landing areas, headquarters, stations, and unloading tracks; in a word, all the enemy's sensitive points situated beyond the range of our heavy artillery.

The commanding generals of the large units ought to verify by all the means at their disposal, especially by personal reconnaissance and reconnaissances by their liaison officers, and by photography, so that all the prescribed measures may be taken

¹ The work of destroying the enemy artillery ought to be continued even after the attack, it being understood that any hostile battery sighted in action for which an accurate direct range can be obtained is subjected to a demolition fire. It ought to be possible to resume the neutralization even after the attack has attained its objectives, if the situation requires it.

² The artillery can be aided to advantage in this task by a judicious use of machine guns firing indirectly and at their greatest range. This use of machine guns to increase the action of the artillery is possible not only in the preparation of the attacks, but also in the execution itself (protection and accompaniment of the attack, counter preparation). It ought not to result in depriving the infantry of the means of fire, of which it will have the use in the first line. It requires a very careful instruction of the units and a very detailed preparation.

and the requisite results obtained. They are responsible for all this.¹

(b) *Execution of the attack proper.*—Necessary to success are—

Good order.

Rapidity, continuity.

Constant artillery support for the infantry.

The different stages of the attack ought therefore to be regulated in advance with the utmost precision.

The infantry either gains the objectives which have been assigned to it or is checked in the course of its advance by forces of the enemy, whose resistance it can not dominate by its own proper means (machine guns, automatic rifles, 37-centimeter guns, V. B. grenades).

In either case it ought immediately—

(1) To report to its artillery the position which it occupies as well as the line occupied by the enemy.

(2) To get ready to make the attack as soon as the new preparation is completed.

For its part the artillery is under obligation to secure information and to strive by every means in its power to gain information of the respective positions of the friendly and hostile infantry. It carries out the preparation on the new objective, either from its initial emplacements or from new emplacements to which the batteries are advanced in accordance with the plan of action and of displacement.

The attack of this objective is then executed according to the methods already described, and with the least possible delay.

As soon as the infantry reaches a zone where the enemy has no more previously organized positions, all the efforts of the command and of the officers executing the attack should be directed toward carrying on the operation even more rapidly by seeing that it has the constant effective support of the artillery. While the methods guiding the execution of the attack remain the same at this moment, the material means used may be less powerful and their application easier to direct, since the defensive organizations of the enemy are henceforth much less firm and his artillery system is necessarily an improvised one.

¹ The moment at which an attack can be launched can not therefore be determined a long time in advance, since this moment depends on the progress of the preparation, the atmospheric conditions, conditions of visibility, etc.

The defeat of the enemy can only be achieved if every resource is utilized from the moment of launching the first attack for the purpose of conducting the entire operations with the greatest rapidity.

Subsequent chapters and the appendices of this note will develop further the application of these methods. The directions that they give are not to be regarded as invariable; there is no formula which excuses commanders from the duty of reflection and intelligent control of the combat.

CHAPTER II.

THE INFANTRY ATTACK.

OBJECTIVES.

The missions assigned to the large units (army corps, divisions) are definitely marked out for them by means of distant points of direction and successive objectives.¹

Each of these objectives is regularly formed by a combination of organizations called a position on which the artillery preparation can be undertaken before the attack and continued during the course of the advance without displacement of the batteries. In a general way the designation of the objectives depends upon what the artillery may be able to accomplish.

In the execution of his mission, the commander of each division issues an order of attack² which notifies the subordinate

¹ The objectives are distributed in space in order to facilitate artillery preparation and reforming in order of the infantry.

² In divisions of three regiments the order of attack of the general of the infantry division gives his directions to the general of the brigade commanding the divisional infantry for all the battalions under his command; to the commanders of the regiments for the whole or the part of their regiment remaining under the orders of the general of the division. This order has therefore to specify clearly the axis of displacement of the brigadier general commanding the divisional infantry, and his mission, in accordance with the normal functions of this general officer (defined by the note of General Headquarters No. 12389 of Aug. 16, 1916) and taking into consideration the necessities of the particular situation. Usually the brigadier general commanding the divisional infantry will be placed in command of the "troops of assault"; he will also have under his command a part of the reserve troops in order to be able to take personal action in this assault, which he can follow closer at hand than the general of the division by reason of the greater flexibility of the group moving behind him. Exceptionally he may exercise command of a larger group which does not include all the "troops of assault" and which will include for some definite purpose a larger proportion of reserve troops.

units (brigades, regiments) of their point of direction and the particular objective or objectives which they are to take.

The purpose of the point of direction is to guide the ulterior action of the units. A distant point is chosen, so as to insure parallelism of efforts.

When, for tactical reasons, an attack has only received a near-by and strictly limited objective, the infantry which has captured the objective should confine its efforts to holding it.

When it is a question of taking several successive objectives without displacing the artillery, the attack should be impetuous and rapid, so as to keep the enemy from re-forming, and to capture or seriously menace his batteries; it ought to be continuous, so as to pass as soon as possible beyond the zone of the positions long organized by the enemy.

The units advance on their objectives without being guided by adjacent units, but endeavoring always to keep contact with them and lending mutual support by their fire (units of the first line) or by their maneuver (units of the second line or reserve), without any halts except those provided for or which are imposed by local resistance or the necessity of destroying the auxiliary defenses on which the preparation may have been insufficient; the attack ought to be systematic, so as to preserve the cohesion, without which the command can no longer utilize its force. Crowding ought to be carefully avoided; for the infantry, order is more important than rapidity.

EFFECTIVES AND FRONTS OF ATTACK.

The offensive battle involves a rapid wastage of the infantry; it is expedient, therefore, to economize in the use of the infantry by sending into action only the necessary forces and by not adopting for the initial formation a uniform distribution.

To permit of many echelons and the formation of important reserves the front of a large unit is usually made all the narrower—

(1) When the objectives attributed to it are more distant and the enemy organizations to be taken are regarded as more important.

(2) When the terrain of attack assigned to this unit seems more favorable for the exploitation of the success.

Inversely, the front of a unit is extended when the objectives are limited in depth, when the hostile organizations to be cap-

tured seem weaker, and when the terrain is not well adapted to the exploitation of success.

It may be assumed as a general proposition that the battle front of the battalion will vary from 300 to 400 meters and that it will have a range of penetration varying from 500 to 1,000 meters. It is on this basis that its offensive possibilities ought to be calculated.¹

FORMATIONS.

For the attack a formation in echelons is taken, which includes units of assault and reserve units.

The units of assault (three or four battalions in the first line and three or four battalions in the second, according to the arrangement adopted) are normally under the direct command of the generals of brigade (either one of the two generals commanding brigades, or both, or of the general of brigade commanding the divisional infantry).

The generals of brigade ought, besides, and in all circumstances, to have under their command a part of the reserve troops, so as to exercise a personal and immediate influence during the development of the action.

TROOPS OF ASSAULT.

The assaulting units are drawn up and maneuver in accordance with the prescriptions of the provisional note appended on the offensive combat of small units (Sept. 27, 1916).²

The terrain of attack should be prepared with regard to the easy assembly and exit of the troops preparatory to departure.

A method for sparing the attacking troops the effect of barrage fire at the moment of attack is to draw up all the troops on the first line before they debouch; the requisite depth is then taken after debouching. This method is not capable of universal application, for it depends upon the available organizations to protect the troops thus closed up against the counter-preparation fire of the enemy, the effects of which may often be more formidable than those of the barrage fire.

¹ If it is impossible for reasons given above to give an invariable figure for the battle front of the division, it may be assumed, nevertheless, that in a breaching combat it will be from 1,000 to 1,200 meters, a number which corresponds to the battle front of three battalions.

² During the preparation the infantry investigates the state of demolition of the auxiliary defenses by reconnaissances and patrols to which observers from the artillery are attached.

The assaulting troops all start together from the trenches and jumping-off trenches. This debouching takes place during the last part of the fire on the advanced trenches of the enemy, the infantry trying to reach these trenches in order, at the moment when the artillery has just lengthened its fire.

RESERVE TROOPS.

The reserves under the command of the corps or brigade commanders, or of the commander of the infantry, depart according to circumstances either on open ground from the emplacements that they occupied at the hour of attack or from the advanced trenches or parallels that they have marched up to through the communication trenches after the battalions of the first line have gone forward.

They march in a formation of small columns.

The reserve troops of the large units (divisions, army corps) follow the movement in conformity with the special orders which have been given to them.

SPECIAL TROOPS.

The special elements which march with the attacking infantry (artillery observers, engineers, Schilt companies, gas and flame service, etc.) are attached to the troops with which they are going to operate long enough in advance to get into close touch with them. The attack order of the unit to which they are attached assigns to them their mission and their place in the formation for attack.

PROGRESS OF THE ATTACK.

The assaulting units cross the auxiliary defenses and march resolutely to the front without getting down into the trenches that they encounter; they close up as near as possible to the moving barrage with which the artillery precedes them. Generally they make their halts on intermediate objectives fixed in advance in the battle order, so as to recover their order, to permit the second line to pass through the first, if there is occasion for this, and to secure a unison between their march and the barrage fire.

The mopping up of the captured positions is confided to detachments especially formed, designated, and prepared for this

purpose, the strength of which varies according to the importance of the enemy organizations.

Having taken the last objectives assigned to them, the units of the first line immediately push out patrols with orders to keep contact with the enemy and to reconnoiter his new position.¹

If the results obtained by these reconnoitering parties and their personal estimation of the situation shows that the occasion is favorable, the commanders of the assaulting units (company, battalion, and regiment commanders) must as a matter of strict duty exploit the success as soon as possible with the means at hand and by bringing into action again, through their liaisons, the supporting artillery. They report immediately to their chiefs if they judge that the exploitation of the success requires the intervention of fresh troops. The indispensable condition is the possibility of communicating with the artillery. This liaison between the infantry and the artillery is to be sought first of all.

In case the reconnaissances show that the attack should confine itself to the retention of the captured objectives, the units of assault immediately commence the consolidation of the conquered ground; they report at once to the artillery their own position and any observing stations that will permit the artillery preparation on the new hostile position that is to be attacked.

The reserves follow the advance of the assaulting units, ready to reinforce them or to maneuver according to the incidents of the combat; the officers and noncommissioned officers will keep them in hand and prevent them from being drawn prematurely into the line of fire. As soon as the assigned objectives have been taken, the reserves endeavor to exploit the success gained, either by continuing to support from the immediate vicinity the troops of assault, if the latter are still capable of advancing, or, in the contrary case, by passing through them and attacking boldly.

In order to be able to act rapidly, as circumstances demand, the commander of a reserve unit will generally be at the moment of attack at the command post of the commander of the troops

¹ Sometimes the patrols pushed out to the front will have as their mission only to exploit the success gained, by undertaking the destruction of batteries, shelters, and hostile works, etc., without having to occupy the conquered ground. In all cases the sending out of patrols is only possible if very accurate provision has been made that the barrage fire should leave open the zones of action intended for these patrols by advancing progressively in front of the limit ahead of these zones and by remaining on their lateral limits.

